

First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 3

Episode Transcript: Luka Parker on “Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference”

(Introduction)

“This I believe, we can understand our differences in mental states with true empathy. Despite our different lives, we can respect each other and find in our hearts to understand those that struggle more than others. I believe that we can make the world a better place with mental health empathy.”

Introductory Speaker: Welcome to The Global Awareness Podcast, where we talk about the four dimensions of global awareness in many different stories from around the world. Within the curriculum of FWS 101, there are four dimensions of global awareness; Of those, our main dimension of focus is the third dimension: Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Differences as we take a trip into the life of someone who struggles with childhood trauma and mental illness, as well as mental health stigma. I have with me, Luka Parker, to talk about some heavy subjects, so I encourage you all to proceed with caution as we touch on these heavy subjects of suicidal thoughts, physical violence, traumatic encounters, mental illness, and so on. If you are struggling, please don’t be afraid to reach out for help to the suicide hotline over text or phone call, as well as many other resources that will be listed at the end of this podcast. I am ... and this is The Global Awareness podcast. <3

My name is Luka M Parker, I am eighteen years old, and I am a victim of domestic violence and narcissistic abuse. I have been diagnosed with severe depression and generalized anxiety, yet have several undiagnosed issues as well. My childhood was a lot different than most of you, but within our differences, I encourage you to find empathy. Mental illness does not discriminate between the healthy or the weak, the young or the old; Mental illness claims hundreds of lives everyday and continues to challenge millions more. You and I are different people, but I encourage you to understand and listen for a moment. “I believe that we can make the world a better place with mental health empathy.”

While you may have grown in a warm and healthy environment, which led you to loving where you are now, others do not get that lucky. NPD or in other words Narcissistic Personality Disorder is what my biological father struggles with, which has created this bottomless pit between our relationship that he built all by himself. Without the right steps to take with his mental illness, he became the monster of my childhood and continues to haunt my siblings lives now. My mom, the healthier of the two, has anxiety and depression and because of this our relationship can be extremely shaky all in itself, as a problem of taking everything on like a personal attack is often in our way of stability. Most of my step-family has PTSD among many other physical and mental medical issues, leading to very fragile relationships with them as well.

My understanding of others is rather broad, I can sense when others are tense, angry, or sad and even with positive emotions, I can just feel it. I understand that the way I was raised

brought this about me; watching, waiting, or seeking for any cues that things will explode. I learned ways of survival at a very young age. However, this has become major triggers for me, molding themselves into sensory issues with sounds and insecurity in certain situations. Living in a house with my mom and step-family was particularly hard within the past few years of my life, seeing as these mental issues cause grand emotions and actions that I've gotten used to as normal. Fights over little things, screaming fights over something someone said, and situations that are deemed dangerous. This made living in my mom's house very difficult and living with a toxic sister and no support, had me moving out of my house at seventeen.

The issues that we have today with mental health stigma is that older people aren't allowed to be mentally ill, to have these debilitating issues that they should've grown out of. My mom and step-dad are in their 40s and hadn't gotten into therapy until two years ago, after my step-dad had threatened to drive into traffic with a bottle of Jack Daniel's and my mom on the phone. I have never wanted anything more than for my mom and biological father to have figured out their issues before me, to have given my brothers and I the chance to grow up in a consistent and safe home. A common misconception about mental illnesses is that it is nothing more than in our heads. But what are we without our brains, which control everything from our conscious thought to the blood flowing through our brains. For example, anxiety disorders are more than being nervous all the time: labored breathing/heart palpitations, constant headaches, anxiety attacks, insomnia, and so much more. I struggle with these and have for many years of my life, living in a constant sense of fear and dissociation. Others say that the trauma only makes you stronger, but I couldn't disagree more.

I made myself stronger, I put myself into therapy, called the hotline, and stayed in mental institutes. I made myself stronger, I pulled myself through, and I did what was best for me to grow and heal. Even when I started to process through the trauma and feel healthier, my anxiety became so uncontrollable that I had to start medication. These things shouldn't have happened to me, I shouldn't have had to heal, and I will never be grateful for what I was put through. I deserved better and so did my brothers. Hold on to that healthiness that some of you have, never lose that feeling of a free brain or "normal" worries. If you ever get into an argument with your parents or guardian, never leave without saying you love them, reach out when you feel in pain.

Understand that the ones who are different from you in this regard, can't just feel better or not be sad. We don't have parents that are easy to approach, that don't understand their faults because the way we were set off in the world 'couldn't possibly be worse' than how their parents did for them. These people need your support in different ways, ask what you can do and listen to what they suggest. All anyone ever needs in this world is empathy and support, despite whether or not you understand it. You can make a difference just by being there, opening your mind, and showing compassion to those that are struggling.

(Sweet Jazz)

That concludes the podcast for today, remember to ask your loved ones how they are or even a friend who might be struggling. The third dimension of global awareness encourages you to

look deeper into your social biases, to think thoroughly before you judge. Ask yourself, ‘Why do I believe what I believe about mental illness and mental health?’ Question why the way you think is completely blocking you from someone you love that is struggling.

If you are the one struggling, don't be afraid to speak to someone you trust, reach out and I am positive someone will grab your hand. If you or a loved one needs emergency help, you can contact someone via call or text at the suicide prevention hotline: +1 800 273 8255. Or if in immediate crisis the emergency line is simply 988. However, if you're looking for somewhere to find support and give support, you can visit “www.thetrevorproject.org” or via phone or text at: 1 866 488 7386. The Trevor Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the mental health of LGBTQ youth and youth alike.

Thank you, this has been The Global Awareness Podcast, and if you are interested in learning about the other three dimensions taught in FWS 101, tune into our next episode!

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